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Marx, Childe, and Trigger

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I first became aware of the work of Bruce Trigger while a graduate student at the University of Arizona in the late 1970s. The heady revolutionary days of the New Archaeology were over, and my professors were busily institutionalizing their revolution as the processual archaeology. In this context, Trigger's name was frequently mentioned, but he was seldom assigned in seminars. The faculty clearly respected him as an iconoclast, as a critical thinker, and as a rebel like themselves. They liked his early settlement pattern research, but they could not embrace him as an ally because they did not know what to make of the theoretical brew that he had cooked up. When *Time and Traditions* came out in 1978, we graduate students passed it around, but we too really did not know what to make of it. On the one hand, his concerns with history, diffusion, and archaeological cultures seemed old-fashioned and perhaps even normative. On the other, he was clearly a materialist who took a systemic view of society, studied evolutionary change, and searched for patterning in the archaeological record. But he was a materialist who did not discount ideology or relegate it to epiphenomena. He explicitly rejected both the New Archaeology and culture history, but his theory seemed to us like some strange amalgam of the two.

Many archaeologists have found Trigger's thought perplexing. He has never fitted easily into the simplistic theoretical oppositions of archaeological debate – normative versus processual or processual versus post-processual. When history was under attack, he advocated history (Trigger 1978), and when the critics turned their knives on sociocultural



evolution, he rose to defend it (Trigger 1998). He has stressed the social, contextual nature of knowledge to the positivists (Trigger 1980a) and the ability of archaeology to move towards a more complete and accurate understanding of the past to the postmodernists (Trigger 1995a, 324). I would not learn how to read Trigger until, as an assistant professor at Binghamton University, I got serious about reading Marx.

Classical Marxism attracts me because in my opinion it accounts better than any other theory for human behaviour as I understand it ... (Trigger 1995b, 349)

Bruce Trigger is one of a handful of anglophone archaeologists who has explicitly embraced Marxism as a way to know the world, as a critique of the world, and as a means to change the world (Patterson 2003). All well-founded Marxist approaches incorporate these three goals, and the tension between them warns Trigger away from both the determinism and false objectivity of positivism and the nihilism and subjectivity of postmodernism. This tension also warns him away from Marxism as a state ideology to legitimate the exercise of political power. He recognizes that the results of such ideology have been alienation, domination, exploitation, and repression (Klejn 1993, 70; Trigger 1995a, 326).

A dynamic, holistic analysis of society and history often referred to as the dialectic lies at the heart of most Marxisms. I would argue that this includes Trigger's theory. I label Trigger's work as dialectical with some trepidation because after pouring over his many pages I did not find the word ever used. Yet, it seems clear to me that the ambiguity that so bedevilled my professor and my fellow graduate students springs from the dialectic.

There is no simple or unambiguous way to define the dialectic, but most definitions share a few general principles. The dialectic views society as a whole within which any given entity is defined by its relationship to other entities. You cannot have teachers without students; each social entity exists because of the existence of its opposite. If interconnectedness is broken, the opposites dissolve away or, more properly, are transformed into something else. By this same token, causes do not exist free of their effects and no variable is ever independent. This social world has an intrinsic dynamic because change in any part of the world alters the whole of the relations, sustaining all elements forever in flux. In the dialectic, the entities that make up the social whole are not expected to fit comfortably together. They may fit, but the dynamics of

change are not to be found in these functional relations. Rather, they lie in relational contradictions that spring from the fact that social categories are defined by and require the existence of their opposite. Thus, slavery defines both the master and the slave. For one to exist, so too must the other, yet they are opposites and as such potentially in conflict. Each has contrary interests and a different lived experience in the context of a shared history. Change in these relations is never simply quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative changes can lead to qualitative change, and qualitative change necessarily implies a quantitative change. Conflicts that result from relational contradictions may result in quantitative changes in those relations that build to a qualitative change. Rebellion by slaves may lead the masters to enforce stricter and stricter discipline, thereby heightening slave resistance until the relation of slavery is overthrown. The social relations that result from such a qualitative change are a mix of the old and the new; the old social form is remade, not replaced.

Thus, Marxism allows Trigger to escape many of the oppositions that bedevil debates about archaeological theory. These oppositions include science versus humanism, objectivity versus subjectivity, the material versus the mental, and evolution versus history. Trigger has sought to examine how these poles are interconnected rather than seeing them as irresolvable opposites. He acknowledges that scholars are part of the social world that they study and that they thus must critically examine their role in that world. But, by the same token, archaeologists study a real past, and Trigger argues that recognizing the subjectivity of the scholar does not negate the possibility of determining the truth or falsehood of specific interpretations.

Trigger was not the only or first scholar to confuse the processual archaeologists. They never quite knew what to do with V. Gordon Childe either. Bruce Trigger (2003a, 7–15) read Childe as an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto. He was already predisposed to believe that political commitment influenced scholarly ideas, and he found that idea reinforced in the classical Marxism of Childe. He also read other works to expand his understanding of the Marxist background to Childe's thinking. In his first explicitly Marxist influenced work, "Engels on the Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man: An Anticipation of Contemporary Archaeological Thinking," Trigger argued that Engels had used Marxism to formulate a deductive, materialist explanation for the biological evolution of humans that presaged that of contemporary American physical anthropologists (Trigger

1967). A “leading American anthropological journal” rejected the paper because the editors feared that political harm might come to the physical anthropologists through guilt by association with Frederick Engels (Trigger 2003b, 13). Trigger noted: “The rejection of my paper was a measure of the enduring scars that McCarthyism had inflicted on academic life in the United States” (Trigger 2003b, 13).

For Trigger, fear of political harassment explained why the New Archaeologists had never really come to grips with the Marxism of Childe, why Leslie White embraced technological determinism, and why Julian Steward settled into an environmental determinism. He bemoaned the fact that this harassment had severed Marxism from neoevolutionary theory and abandoned Marxist theory to ideologues (Trigger 2003b, 16).

During the 1970s, Trigger (1978) developed a critique of processual archaeology. He welcomed the move away from culture history and taxonomy but could not embrace the new theory. He found the New Archaeology’s characterizations of a “normative” archaeology overly simplistic and in error. He rejected the determinism and false objectivity inherent in its positivist epistemology and in the simplistic oppositions of the debate between materialism and idealism. Most of all, he defended history, which he saw as having been badly treated by both its Boasian advocates and their New Archaeological critics. Patterson finds Trigger’s critique “highly original” but not necessarily “rooted in Marxist social thought” (2003, 157). Patterson is certainly correct that Trigger’s analysis lacks an explicit use of Marxist social concepts. However, a dialectical logic pervades the critique: “There is not evidence of a split between Childe as a humanist, and as a Marxist or social scientist” (Trigger 1980b, 168).

Yet, all the while that Trigger was evaluating the New Archaeology, he was still contemplating Childe. I remember reading Trigger’s *Gordon Childe: Revolutions in Archaeology*. For the first time, Childe made sense to me as a Marxist scholar, not as the confused diffusionist turned neoevolutionist I had been taught he was. From any review of Trigger’s work, it is clear that Childe had a seminal influence on his thought. In equal measure, however, Trigger has been the scholar most responsible for formulating a coherent, contemporary understanding of Childe for archaeology. Trigger plumbed the depths of Childe’s thinking to reveal the ways in which “Childe’s thought continues to constitute an important challenge to archaeology” (1980b, 19). Trigger found the ongoing relevance of Childe through a serious consideration of Childe’s Marxism.

Childe looms large in the history of anglophone archaeology. He is probably the most widely cited English-speaking archaeologist of the twentieth century and the most broadly known both within and without of the profession. Yet both his contemporaries and his descendants have had great trouble figuring him out.

For his contemporaries at the middle of the twentieth century, the problem was how to separate Childe's considerable substantive contributions from his Marxist challenges to the ideologies on both sides of the Cold War. In Russia, Soviet authors both praised Childe as the "most eminent archaeologist of the twentieth century" and decried him as a captive of "bourgeois science" (Trigger 1980b, 14–15). North American archaeologists could not reconcile Childe's early diffusionist interpretations of European prehistory with his later evolutionary work *Man Makes Himself* or the humanism of his European syntheses with the deductive approach of his later work (Braidwood 1958; Rouse 1958). In England, archaeologists sought to downplay or deny Childe's Marxism. In numerous places Glyn Daniel denied that Childe was a Marxist, and he asserted, "He [Childe] remained firmly a diffusionist preaching a modified form of the excesses of the Manchester School" (Daniel 1981, 162).

In the second half of the twentieth century, archaeological reformers have attempted to legitimate their new approaches by finding bits and pieces of what they want to do in Childe. New Archaeologists embraced Childe as one of the first archaeologists to speak of process, to advocate evolution, and to propose sets of testable propositions for his theories (Binford 1972, 79, 427). Gordon Willey and Jeremy Sabloff (1974, 180) identified Childe as an evolutionist who fed influences into the mainstream of American archaeology that led to the development of the New Archaeology. In the manifesto of the post-processual archaeology, *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Hodder 1982), the authors advocated a reactionary view that harked back to the humanism of Childe. Mark Leone (1982), in his commentary on the volume, called the post-processualists "Childe's Offspring."

Clearly, Childe was a complex, insightful, and path-breaking thinker, and his contemporaries and the reformers picked and chose from this complexity to find the bits of his ideas that they wanted. They failed to see the coherent whole of Childe's archaeology because they attempted to understand him in terms of either-or oppositions, determinates, and categorical thinking. Trigger was able to make sense of the whole of Childe's archaeology because he recognized that Childe's Marxism (like



all well-conceived Marxism) understood social change to be overdetermined, recognized oppositions to be the products of contradictions, and understood categories to be only comprehensible in terms of their relationship to other aspects of society.

Marxist lenses allowed Trigger (1980b, 168–79) to see the coherent whole of Childe's archaeology. Childe began with the assumption that society forms an interconnected totality and that cultural change had to be explained in societal terms. Technology was key in his explanations but not determinate. Social and ideological factors could both assist and impede the process of change. Childe accepted a notion of evolutionary change, but since such a process could not be in some simple way determined, he also stressed the role of historical processes, specifically diffusion, in processes of change. He toyed with the idea of universal laws for human behaviour and cultural change. Ultimately, he rejected this idea because he realized that human nature and the rules governing society were not fixed but rather subject to revolutionary change. This rejection of determinism and universal laws led Childe to combine a materialist perspective on change with a humanistic focus on the human side as opposed to the animal side of *Homo sapiens* behaviour. One of the most impressive things about Childe was his detailed knowledge of the archaeological record, and he insisted that data should be the starting point for archaeological theory. Unlike many Marxists, he tended to take a functionalist view of society and adaptation, but he did advocate contradictions within society as the mechanisms that produced social change. Like all Marxists, he saw scholarship as a human, social endeavour with political inspirations and consequences.

By eliminating the white man's definition of history as studying themselves and of anthropology as the science of allegedly simple peoples, archaeology may at last transcend some of the false consciousness that is a heritage from America's colonialist past. It is our duty to recognize this heritage for what it is and to overcome it.
(Trigger 1980a, 674)

In the 1980s, Trigger (1984b, 1985, 1993b) advocated an explicitly Marxist approach to archaeology that he grounded in a Marxism very much like that of Childe. Key to this approach was his critique of the political nature of archaeological thought, which resulted in a series of articles and a book that helped to inspire a major shift in the historiography of archaeology. With a few notable exceptions, such as Robert

Silverberg's (1968) *The Mound Builders of Ancient America*, the authors of previous English-language histories of archaeology had written about great men, their achievements, and the march of progress in archaeology. In contrast, Trigger argued that political and social realities such as nationalism, colonialism, and class struggle strongly influenced archaeological interpretations. In these contexts, archaeology both produced ideology and was a product of ideology. Yet he recognized that the accumulation of data mitigated the effects of these realities. Thomas Patterson (1986, 2003) embarked on a similar program of research and publication at about the same time. This critical and social approach to the history of archaeology has become the dominant one, as indicated by more recent Marxist (McGuire 1992), feminist (Kehoe 1998), indigenous (Watkins 2000), and other (Arnold 1990; Klejn 1993) studies.

Trigger's (1980a) "Archaeology and the Image of the American Indian" had a profound effect on me as a graduate student. I had entered college in a time of red power, I had furtively read Vine Deloria's (1969) book *Custer Died For Your Sins*, and I had been an undergraduate student at Colorado State University in 1971, when American Indian Movement activists took over a physical anthropology laboratory (Watkins 2000, 7). It was enlightening for me to see an archaeologist taking Native American distrust of archaeology seriously and more importantly trying to make critical sense of that fact. Trigger maintained that North American archaeologists had embraced an ideology that aboriginal peoples were incapable of change to justify a colonialist practice of archaeology. He also argued that the heavy weight of data had forced archaeologists gradually to reject this ideology. He praised the New Archaeology for establishing that aboriginal people were as creative as other people, but he noted that the archaeologists' focus on generalization alienated them from living aboriginal people. For me as a graduate student, this analysis not only explained the controversies of my formative years in the profession but also pointed to ways to tackle those controversies as a scholar and an archaeologist.

In 1984 Trigger argued that the position of countries in the modern world system very much influenced the practice of archaeology in those countries (Trigger 1984a). He posited that there were three basic approaches to archaeology: nationalist, colonialist, and imperialist. In each case, he showed how the aspirations, interests, and fears of the dominant classes influenced the form of archaeology. At that time I was in the processes of beginning a still ongoing research project in Mexico. Nearly a decade before, at a meeting at Teotihuacan, a group of largely

Marxist Latin American archaeologists had met and produced a manifesto that called for an *arqueología social* that confronted the power relations and imperialism of Yankee archaeology in Mexico (Lorenzo 1976). Trigger's analysis helped me make sense of the confrontation between a nationalist Mexican archaeology and an imperialist U.S. archaeology. It also helped me to formulate an approach to working in Mexico that transcended these differences (McGuire 1997, 2002).

I find it significant that Trigger (1989a) entitled his historical opus *A History of Archaeological Thought* as opposed to "A History of Archaeology." For Trigger, archaeological thought is a complex thing. It results from two major influences (Trigger 1989a, 15). First, the ideas and interests of social groups influence the archaeological interpretations that these social groups then use as tools to achieve their goals in particular contexts. Second, archaeologists accumulate data about the past and these data constitute a test of earlier interpretations. Trigger (1989a, 14) argues that the development of archaeology corresponds to the rise of the middle classes in the West. In this context, archaeology has served an ideological purpose of providing societies, nations, and groups with mythical charters that justify their existence, interests, aspirations, and authority.

For many of us, the main lesson of Trigger's histories was that archaeology is a product of a specific class or community. This conflicted with both the normative idea of archaeology as the gathering of facts and the processualist notion of archaeology as a method to obtain objective (i.e., context free) understanding of the processes of cultural change. The implication from this was that we could create an archaeology that served the interest of communities other than the middle classes and thus use it as an instrument to challenge the powerful rather than legitimate them (Shanks and McGuire 1996). This has led to efforts to develop feminist (Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 1998), indigenous (Watkins 2000), and working-class (McGuire and Reckner 2003) archaeologies, among others. Trigger (1989b, 797) would not, however, necessarily agree with these efforts, since he worries that political partisanship would dominate such efforts and destroy any objectivity in them.

Trigger (2003b, 13) has reflected on the relativism of his own work. He recognizes that his considerations of context were incomplete because, like most Marxists of his generation, he had not given enough attention to gender and gender inequality (Trigger 2003b, 15). Like Childe, Trigger realizes that the material world of archaeology and the data we generate do not exist independent of thought but that only by



struggling to find a correspondence between our views of reality and the material world can we generate data and true understanding. For Trigger, this is an inexact and imperfect process, heavily influenced by social, political, and ideological context, but one still capable of generating and being shaped by our cumulative knowledge of the past. This position put him at odds with both the determinism of processual archaeology and with the relativism of post-processual archaeology. "True knowledge is and always has been the reformer's strongest weapon. Reformers must never surrender it" (Trigger 1995a, 331).

Trigger (1995b, 349) acknowledged the influence of social and political context on the creation of ideas, but he was suspicious of theories that assigned too much independent transformational power to ideas. Just as he contrasted the concern of classical Marxism for the context of knowledge creation with the feigned objectivity of processual archaeology, he also confronted the relativism of post-processual archaeology with the materialism of Classical Marxism.

Trigger (1989b, 783) recognized that the post-processual archaeology advocated by Ian Hodder and his students at Cambridge represented a return to many of the major themes that had dominated a culture-historical archaeology. These included history, ethnology, context, and the subjectivity of the researcher, and all of them were themes that he had defended and promoted in opposition to processual archaeology. But Trigger found these things linked to a hyperrelativism that failed to recognize the importance of the real world in the formation of archaeological thought. He initially linked these ideas to a critical, humanistic, "neo-Marxism" (Trigger 1989b).

Trigger argued that the "constraints of archaeological evidence are not negligible" (1989b, 790). He noted that although social and political context affected how archaeologists studied the past, these biases were not inherent in the archaeological record. The power of archaeology for social transformation lay in the archaeologist's ability to accumulate facts about the past that could challenge pernicious uses of history. He was concerned that the post-processual relativistic position offered the archaeologist no way to transcend their social and political context to produce knowledge that was not simply a reflection of their self-interest. It left them with no basis except political belief for confronting the manipulation of archaeology by states, elites, and totalitarian movements.

Trigger (1990, 1995a, 1998) developed his critique of the post-processual archaeology through a series of papers in the 1990s. Most



recently, his criticisms have followed the more general critiques of post-modernism by Marxist scholars (Trigger 1995a; 1998, 245). He argues that contemporary neo-conservative forces have rewarded postmodernism (and its archaeological manifestation as post-processual archaeology) because of its relativism and nihilism. The relativism deligitimizes any attempt by archaeology to challenge these forces, and the nihilism of the approach leads scholars to underestimate their ability to challenge them. Trigger (1995a, 327) contends that the social sciences must seek a more objective view of the world and knowledge in order to change society for the collective good.

The challenge of the present is for progressive anthropologists to draw on their knowledge of social behaviour to try to design societies of a sort that have never existed before in human history. (Trigger 2003a, 42)

For Trigger, the ultimate goal of anthropological scholarship is to transform the social world. He urges us to work towards a society that is technologically advanced, culturally diverse, and egalitarian in both its economy and politics, and in which all people share in both the rewards and responsibilities of living on this earth. He finds the means to this goal in a critical awareness of the social and political context of our scholarship and in a search for true knowledge. In the last decade, Trigger has made the political implications of his research more overt. He has confronted neo-conservative ideologies such as the “end of history” (Trigger 1995a) and the core assumptions of neo-liberalism (Trigger 2003a). These efforts have been embedded in critical considerations of sociocultural evolution and human nature.

Trigger (1998, xi) equates the rejection of sociocultural evolution with the extreme relativism of post-processual archaeology. Even outside of this theoretical group there can be little doubt that sociocultural evolution has lost popularity in archaeology. In his book *Sociocultural Evolution*, Trigger (1998) provides a critical historical analysis. He examines the concept of sociocultural evolution both in terms of the social and political contexts of its formulation and use and in terms of its relationship to the accumulation of knowledge about the past. He recognizes that varied political and social agendas have used sociocultural evolution and that the concept has carried the heavy baggage of ethnocentrism (Trigger 1998, 225). He notes, however, that these problems spring from the political uses of the concept and that these uses do not

address the question of whether or not there is shape and direction to human history. He did not see racism and ethnocentrism as being inherent in sociocultural evolution (Trigger 1995, 348). Trigger argues that for sociocultural evolution to be an essential concept for understanding human history, its proponents must address ideas of determinism, inevitable directions of change, and value judgments. Once accomplished, they can study sociocultural evolution within the historical contexts of real human life. He also maintains that the reality of sociocultural evolution demonstrates the falseness of the conservative assertion that we are living at the “end of history” and that only free enterprise awaits in our future (Trigger 1998, 192–3, 256).

Trigger’s ten years of research that culminated in *Understanding Early Civilizations* (2003c) involved a critique both of the assumptions of neo-liberalism and of Marxist treatments of human nature, including Marx’s own claims, though not his practice. He questions the Enlightenment assumption that humans are inherently altruistic. He argues that egalitarian relations in small-scale societies must be maintained by ridicule, gossip, and fear of witchcraft. Thus, hunter-gatherer societies do not provide a model for the future, but they do demonstrate that social and political egalitarianism is possible in human societies. His cross-cultural study of early civilizations indicates that these mechanisms fail with an increase in social complexity. He argues that the inevitable result of evolutionary changes in societies is institutionalized political, social, and economic inequality. He recognizes that high-level decision-making is required in complex political systems but that this does not explain why such managerial elites appropriate top-heavy surpluses for their own use. He takes this as evidence that altruism is not inherent in the human condition and that we cannot create more-just societies simply by removing the corrupting influences of modes of production such as capitalism. Rather we have to imagine and design control mechanisms that will work in technologically advanced large-scale societies in a manner analogous to the role of ridicule, gossip, and fear of witchcraft in small-scale societies.

Marxism is not a divine revelation but a scientific theory and method that in the opinion of most of its adherents aims to test itself by transforming society. (Trigger 1984b, 61)

Trigger’s theory differs from both the processual and the post-processual archaeologies because it is Marxist. His classical Marxism may also be

contrasted with other Marxist approaches to archaeology. Approaches to Marxism can be differentiated based on how they weight the goals of knowledge, critique, and action, and on how they relate these three goals one to the other. They also differ in the amount of tolerance they will give to competing Marxisms (Trigger 1995a). Trigger has explicitly contrasted his approach of classical Marxism with the state ideologies of the former Marxist states, structural Marxism, and neo-Marxism. His strong advocacy of a classical Marxism also attracted the admiration of Spanish-speaking scholars who developed the *arqueología social* in Latin America and Spain.

Trigger separated his Marxism from the state ideology of the Soviet Union. He noted that Childe had rejected the Marxist theory that dominated Soviet archaeology after World War II, and Trigger adopted the same qualified interest in Soviet archaeology that characterized Childe's research in the 1950s. The Soviets' dogmatic imposition of Marxism on archaeological data violated one of Trigger's (1998a, 235) key tenets: to wit, that science should consider opposing views of the same issue and submit all views to rigorous, empirical review and evaluation. Following Leo Klejn (1993), he described the Marxist ideology of the Soviet state as alienating, dominating, exploitative, and antithetical to science (Trigger 1995a, 326).

Trigger employed his critique of neo-Marxist theory primarily against post-processual authors who were influenced by Marxism but never adopted a Marxist point of view. These included scholars such as Ian Hodder, Christopher Tilley, and Michael Shanks. Trigger (1989b, 1998) identified neo-Marxism as originating in the critical Marxism of the Frankfurt School and with Antonio Gramsci's writings. He applauded the understanding that archaeological interpretations were subjective and influenced by social milieus, but worried that they lured these authors to an extreme epistemological realism. From this point of view, there exists no objective means to determine the falsehood of ideas and radical praxis is accomplished by encouraging multiple views of the past. Trigger (1989b, 786) praised neo-Marxist scholars such as Mark Leone for arguing that considerations of subjectivities could be used to control them and thus create more objective understandings of the past. But he faulted them for not developing formal methodologies to do so.

In the 1970s, a French-derived structural Marxism became fashionable, especially in anthropology and British archaeology (Patterson 2003, 98). This theory built on the work of Louis Althusser and sought to replace the dialectics of classical Marxism with a theory of structuralism. Advocates of the theory argued that superstructural elements, such as

religion and ideology, were the motor of political developments in the evolution of states (Friedman and Rowlands 1977). In a comparative study of early states, Trigger (1993a) did not find the motor of political development to be in the superstructure but rather in the dialectic between religion and the state, which varied depending on the socioeconomic and class structure of the state. Structural Marxists also argued that all societies, including primitive ones, could be analysed using class analysis: that is, that processes analogous to class exist in all societies. For archaeology, Dean Saitta (1994) has argued that, in primitive societies, class processes are subsumed within kin relations. Trigger (1993b, 179) criticized the uniformitarian view of human behaviour inherent in such structural Marxist positions and argued instead that the social relations of primitive communal societies are fundamentally different than those of either tributary or capitalist states (see also Patterson 2003, 132–40).

A Marxist *arqueología social* developed in the Spanish-speaking world in the 1970s and 1980s. A self-conscious Marxist archaeology in Latin America sprang from the leftist revolutionary movements of the 1960s and the concurrent development of an anti-imperialist intellectual tradition (McGuire and Navarrete 1999; Benavidas 2001). The *arqueología social* found the starting point for archaeology as a social science in the work of V. Gordon Childe but realized that his work could not be applied directly to their context (Lorenzo 1976, 6; Vargas and Sanoja 1999, 60). Proponents of the *arqueología social* sought to reformulate the concepts of Marx to apply them to the aboriginal history of Latin America, and in so doing, they were critical of both neo-Marxism and structural Marxism (Benavidas 2001). In Spain, the explicit development of a Marxist archaeology followed the death of the dictator Franco in 1975. As in Latin America, these Spaniards sought to develop a scientific Marxism grounded in a classical approach (Castro et al. 1998). These Hispanic archaeologists have embraced Trigger's research as one of the few like-minded lines of thought in anglophone archaeology.

Yet there are some indications that in the darkest hour of its political existence, classical Marxism as a materialistic philosophical system may be beginning a process of renewal that will allow it once again to compete with alternative views of human behaviour. (Trigger 1993b)

In the broadest sense, we can speak of two major Marxist theoretical currents within archaeology today. The first of these derives from what

Trigger has called “classical Marxism.” The second derives from a more humanistic approach based in a Hegelian dialectic and a relational theory of Marxism (McGuire 1992). All Marxists seek to gain knowledge of the world, critique the world, and take action in the world, but within these two broad approaches, they differ in the weight they give each of these goals and how they relate each to the other. The similarities and differences of these two approaches are probably best illustrated by a comparison of how they lead to similar and different interpretations of real archaeological cases.

These two approaches begin with different concepts of the dialectic. Classical Marxists tend to accept Engels’s (1940) concept of the dialectics of nature and apply the dialectic to the study of both the natural and the social world. In contrast, humanistic or Hegelian Marxists see the dialectic as a uniquely social phenomena. The dialectics of nature seek the general laws governing the development of nature, science, society, and thought (Woods and Grant 1995). They treat all phenomena as being in a state of perpetual change and movement. The motor for this change lies in struggle and contradiction. The dialectics of nature tend to overlap and complement ideas of chaos theory and of complex adaptive systems (Woods and Grant 1995). A Hegelian dialectic treats Marxism as a theory of relations and society as a complex web of social relations within which the relation of any entity to other entities governs what that entity will be. Teachers do not exist without students, nor students without teachers. It is the underlying relationship of teaching and learning that defines both. Such a dialectical relationship depends upon the entities involved forming a unity of opposites. Such a unity of opposites cannot exist in the study of nature. A unity of opposites exists in the study of the social world because scholars are part of the social world that they study. The scholar may be the subject and the object of the study; it is the relationship of study that creates scholars (subjects) and informants (objects). The study of nature produces scientists, but it does not produce nature. The study of geology creates geologists, but it does not create rocks.

These different interpretations of the dialectic have implications for how Marxists construct research and interpret social change. For a classical Marxist like Trigger, gaining knowledge of the world lies at the core of research. The role of the scholar is to gain as objective as possible an understanding of the world to provide a basis for action to transform the world (Trigger 1995a, 329). This enterprise begins with a critique of the subjective nature of knowledge with a goal of overcoming

that subjectivity. For Hegelian Marxists, critique lies at the core of research. The scholar obtains knowledge of the world through observation but must be constantly critical of how and why that knowledge is accepted. Interpretations of the past must fit the observations that we make about the past, but we must also critique how such knowledge flows from, creates, and reinforces the relational contradictions that define the society of which we are a part. In other words, we must remember that all knowledge is social, a complex mix of our observations of the real world and the social context of those observations. Social action follows from this complex understanding and is the ultimate test of it. That test again requires critique of both the knowledge and the action.

One place this opposition is clear is in how critique and knowledge are transformed into praxis. For Trigger, the reformer's main weapon is true knowledge. Many of us would agree with this position but also argue that archaeology must be more than a bourgeois practice in order for "true knowledge" to have a transformative impact on the world. Put more simply, we do not believe that an archaeology that speaks to and for the bourgeois will be transformative because the bourgeois have no interests that would be served by such a transformation. We would argue instead that archaeology needs to serve the interests of different communities, for example the working class (McGuire and Reckner 2003) and indigenous peoples (Watkins 2000). Trigger fears, however, that with a loss of objectivity, archaeology will become simply a prop for preconceived ideologies, as it became in the Soviet Union, and that such an archaeology risks self-deception. He wants us to stand aside from the fray more as referees than players. Yet, it is Trigger who lays out the process by which this anxiety may be alleviated.

Trigger (1989a) has made the convincing case that modern archaeology resulted from the development of the capitalist middle classes and that archaeology has served the interests of that class. He also argues, however, that the accumulation of knowledge by archaeology has resisted the ideologies of the bourgeoisie despite the class basis of archaeological practice. He identifies the key to this process as being a focus on empirical reality and a reluctance to dismiss lightly evidence that does not support current political beliefs. Thus, he argues that the reason to consider the political nature of archaeology is to arrive at a more objective understanding of the world.

Others and I agree and would support these efforts within the traditional boundaries of archaeology. But we would argue that there is more to be done because, as Trigger recognizes, what knowledge we

accumulate depends also upon what questions and interests we bring to our research. We wish to allow communities other than the middle classes to define the interests and questions of archaeology. In doing so, we resist simply providing these communities with mythical charters that justify their existence, interests, aspirations, and authority. Rather, we wish to critically and empirically answer the archaeological questions these communities raise to arrive at knowledge that will transform the political struggles of our world. We feel that such efforts, combined with the type of archaeology that Trigger advocates, stand the best hope of contributing to a change in society for the collective good of a majority of human beings.

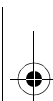
The reading of Bruce Trigger that I began as a graduate student is not over. As with Marx, and Childe, each time I return to his work I find new insight and new substance that I missed in a previous reading. I find this more and more true as my own thinking about archaeology and its role in the world matures and grows. I know that Marx, Childe, and Trigger will continue to broaden my knowledge.

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